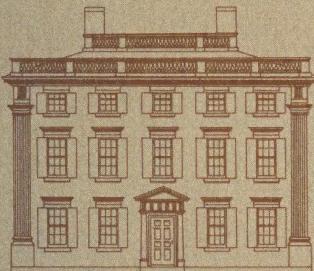
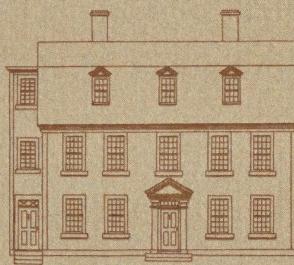


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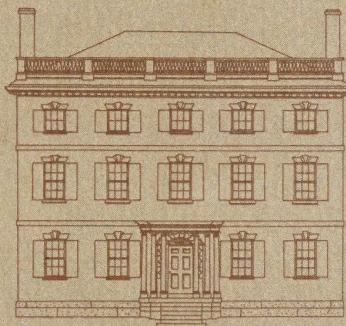
## Historic House Booklet Series



Peirce-Nichols



Crowninshield-Bentley



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EDITED BY

Anne Farnam and Bryant F. Tolles, Jr.

Essex Institute, Salem, Massachusetts  1978



# THE ASSEMBLY HOUSE

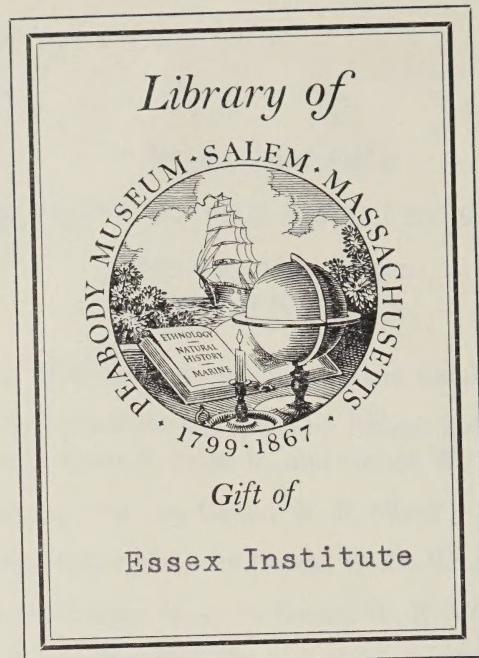


BY GERALD W.R. WARD

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: The Assembly House (1782; 1796, etc.), 130 Federal Street, Salem, south front facade. *Photograph by Richard Merrill, 1972.*

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# The Assembly House

Historic House Booklet Number Three



BY GERALD W. R. WARD

FOREWORD BY BRYANT F. TOLLES, JR.

Essex Institute · Salem · Massachusetts · 1976



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## Foreword

FOUNDED in 1848 by the merging of the Essex Historical Society (incorporated in 1821) and the Essex County Natural History Society (incorporated in 1836), the Essex Institute is one of America's oldest and most venerable regional historical societies. The Institute is supported almost entirely by private funds, and is composed of the James Duncan Phillips research library, a museum of American fine and decorative arts, and a group of seven period houses, six of which are open to the public. The Institute's collections include books, pamphlets, periodicals, graphic materials, furniture, paintings, and other decorative and historic objects associated with the civil history and the people of Essex County, Massachusetts, since the early seventeenth century. Through its varied treasures, collected over many generations, the Essex Institute is uniquely able to recount the life and culture of one of the most historically important areas in the northeastern United States.

Of its many fascinating possessions and programs, the Essex Institute has been perhaps most widely associated with the maintenance and interpretation of its historic house properties. One of the nation's first private organizations to enter the field of historic preservation, the Institute acquired and relocated its first historic house property—the John Ward House (1684)—in 1910, and has added to its collection of representative local domestic architecture over the years since. Today, the Institute boasts a nationally significant group of historic dwellings which span sequentially the history of residential architecture in Salem from the era of its early settlement and growth in the seventeenth century to the mid-Victorian period.

Three years ago, under the guidance of my predecessor, David B. Little, a project was initiated to research and compile an updated series of illustrated articles treating each of the Institute's houses. From January 1974 to April 1976 these articles, written by Boston University doctoral

candidates Gerald W. R. Ward and Barbara M. Ward, appeared individually in the Institute's quarterly *Historical Collections*. Now, thanks to a generous grant from the McCarthy Family Foundation Charity Fund, it is possible to make the Ward articles, expanded and supplemented with other material, available in reasonably priced pamphlets for general distribution.

None of this, of course, could have been possible without the painstaking efforts of the authors; the museum and library staff; my assistant, Katherine W. Richardson; and my coeditor, Institute curator Anne Farnam. We hope that the readers of these pamphlets will profit educationally from them and will experience the same enjoyment from the subject matter as did those of us involved in the editorial process. The printed word or the photograph cannot do complete justice, however, to the houses themselves; they and their rich contents must be directly experienced for one to appreciate their merit as documents of the American past.

BRYANT F. TOLLES, JR.  
*Director, Essex Institute*

#### AUTHOR

GERALD W. R. WARD was awarded an A.B. degree, *cum laude*, with a concentration in American national government, from Harvard University in 1971. Presently he is a doctoral candidate in the American and New England Studies Program at Boston University, where the emphasis of his studies is on American art and architecture. During the summers of 1973 and 1974 Mr. Ward was a National Endowment for the Humanities Museum Fellow at the Essex Institute, at which time he researched and compiled articles for this historic house booklet series. During the academic year 1973-74 he was involved in practicum courses at the Institute as a cataloguer of the wallpaper collection and as an editorial assistant. In 1974-75 he was an N.E.H. Fellow in the Garvan and Related Collections office of the Yale University Art Gallery. Currently he is working on his doctoral thesis.

## The Assembly House

SALEM is blessed with a number of streets that retain superb examples of early American dwellings. Chestnut, Essex, Broad, and Derby streets boast many such houses, and Washington Square is surrounded by splendid Federal mansions. Among these pleasant thoroughfares is Federal Street, laid out in the western end of town in the second half of the eighteenth century. About halfway down Federal Street, beyond the Peirce-Nichols House and heading out of town, rests the Assembly House, built as a public hall in 1782, remodeled as a private dwelling some fifteen years later by Samuel McIntire (1757-1811), and since 1965 owned and maintained for the benefit of the public by the Essex Institute. Since its beginning the Assembly House has been one of Salem's most historic and attractive buildings, and its visitors and occupants comprise a list of noteworthy people from Salem and the world. The following essay attempts to disinter the story of this house and its people.

### I

In 1782 a small group of Salem men joined together for the purpose of erecting a new assembly room, where balls, dances, concerts, lectures, theatricals, oratorios, and other social and cultural events might be held. Salem, for the moment, was without an appropriate setting for such convivial gatherings. An early assembly room, built in 1766 near the corner of Cambridge and Chestnut Streets, had been converted into a meetinghouse in 1774. Washington Hall, Concert Hall, and Hamilton Hall, future locations for these affairs, were not built until after 1792.<sup>1</sup>

1. The 1766 assembly room, Washington Hall, and Hamilton Hall will be discussed later in the text. Concert Hall was built in 1793 on Central Street and was destroyed by fire in 1844 (Robert S. Rantoul, "Washington in Essex County," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 108 [January 1922]:6).

Some confusion has rightly resulted due to the similarity in names among the various

While its precise origins remain somewhat obscure, it is clear that the new Assembly House was funded through a type of joint-stock venture, whereby a subscriber purchased shares in the house, became a proprietor, and presumably shared in the expenses and profits, if any. It seems that a committee, with one Sam Pierson acting as treasurer, solicited funds for construction during 1782, and while some thirty men eventually became proprietors of the Assembly House, only four documents concerning the earliest origins of the house have come to light. A receipt preserved at the Essex Institute records that Pierson, on behalf of the committee, "Received of Capt. John Fisk twenty four Pounds, towards Building an Assembly Room" on 4 October 1782. On 26 November of the same year, Fisk paid an additional "sixteen pounds in full for his subscription towards an assembly House," again receiving a receipt from Pierson.<sup>2</sup> Joshua Ward and William Orne also received similar receipts for £20 subscriptions.<sup>3</sup> Fiske Kimball estimated that some twenty gentlemen, each holding one or more shares out of a total of approximately sixty, combined to fund the erection of the house.<sup>4</sup> These figures, while perhaps somewhat conservative, present a reasonably accurate picture of the manner in which the Assembly House was initiated.

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buildings used in Salem for assembly purposes. James Duncan Phillips, for example, labels a picture of the Assembly House as "Built in 1782 on the corner of Chestnut and Cambridge Streets, moved to 138 Federal Street before 1805 and converted into a dwelling" (*Salem in the Nineties* [Salem: Essex Institute, 1953]). This was clearly not the case, and Phillips, along with other mistakes, was confusing the 1766 assembly room with the 1782 Assembly House.

The confusion has been compounded by the use of the same term for different buildings. For example, both the Assembly House and Concert Hall were referred to on occasion as a "concert hall." A helpful fact to rely on is that the Assembly House under consideration here was the only such institution in Salem between 1782 and 1792.

2. Both receipts are in John Fisk's Receipt Book, 1782-83, at the Essex Institute. The identity of Sam Pierson remains a mystery. He does not seem to have been a proprietor himself, and diligent searching in the records has not revealed even the slightest information concerning his life.

3. Joshua Ward's receipt, while undated, is among his papers for 1783 at the Essex Institute. In the same grouping is a bill dated 29 January 1783 in which Ward pays Benjamin Daland for a ride to the Assembly House. The Orne receipt, dated 4 October 1782, is in the D. A. White Collection, Box 1, Essex Institute.

4. S. Fiske Kimball, *Mr. Samuel McIntire, Carver, the Architect of Salem* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1940), p. 92 (hereafter referred to as Kimball, *McIntire*). Kimball has written the standard work on McIntire and the Assembly House, and the discussion here is indebted to his work at nearly every turn.

Whatever the exact case, Pierson and his fellow committee members were successful in their drive to sell subscriptions, for on 28 December 1782, the Salem lawyer William Pynchon, in company with Stephen Sewall and Major Orne, went "to see the new Assembly Room, and admire it (as politeness requires)."<sup>5</sup>

Unlike several historic Salem houses, the Assembly House was built where it stands today, at what is now 138 Federal Street. In 1782 this land was owned by Daniel Mackey of Salem, and was apparently leased from him by the Assembly House proprietors. Mackey's land had originally been granted to Thomas Spooner by the Salem selectmen in 1651, and had passed through several hands before becoming the property of Joshua Hicks, who died possessed of it in 1757. In a 1761 settlement of Hicks' estate, Elizabeth Hicks Mackey, the wife of Daniel, received the land on which the Assembly House was eventually built.<sup>6</sup> Mackey's refusal to sell the land to the proprietors caused them some concern, for on 18 August 1785, a group of seven (John Norris, Joshua Ward, William Stearns, Isaac Osgood, Edward Pulling, Francis Cabot, Jr., and Samuel Blyth) purchased from the estate of Joseph Dowse a lot of land immediately to the west of the Assembly House.<sup>7</sup> This parcel was sufficiently large to accommodate the house should its removal from Mackey's land be necessary.

The proprietors maintained pressure on Mackey to sell his land, however, going so far as to place an advertisement in *The Salem Gazette* of 29 January 1793 calling for proposals for moving the Assembly House "about 60 feet west of its present situation."<sup>8</sup> The prospect of losing what must have been a valuable rental income prompted Mackey to sell before it was too late. On 9 February 1793 Mackey deeded to a committee of John Fisk, Jacob Ashton, John Norris, and William Stearns the land under and around the Assembly House for

5. William Pynchon, *The Diary of William Pynchon of Salem*, ed. Fitch Edward Oliver (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1890), p. 139 (hereafter referred to as Pynchon).

6. The early history and title of the Assembly House property are discussed in Mrs. Ralf P. Emerson, "A Footnote to Mr. Samuel McIntire, Carver, being a documented account of the controversy between Daniel Mackey etc.," manuscript at the Essex Institute. This short essay cites chapter and verse on the complicated early land transactions.

7. Essex County Registry of Deeds, Book 144, leaf 271 (hereafter referred to as EC Deeds). Isaac Osgood's name appears twice in this deed's list of grantees, once as "Isaac Osgood, gentleman" and the other time as merely "Isaac Osgood."

8. Cited in Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 92.

£80. This land was to be "for the sole use of them and others proprietors and owners of said assembly house in such proportions and parts as they and the others may severally be interested in and be owners of said house."<sup>9</sup> No longer in need of it as a safety measure, the proprietors disposed of the land to the west of the Assembly House on 4 August 1794, retaining only a small portion to square off their new lot.<sup>10</sup>

The exact appearance of the building erected in 1782 by the proprietors will probably never be known, nor has the name of its architect or housewright come down to us. Through comparisons with other assembly rooms, and with the aid of such meagre contemporary accounts as we have, we can piece together an outline of the floor plan and gather some clues as to the nature and quality of the interior furnishings and accoutrements of the building, but this is the best we can do at the present time.

Such assembly rooms were not uncommon in late eighteenth-century America. Often located in taverns or inns, they acted as centers of the social life of a town. A brief examination of several such rooms, in Salem and elsewhere, reveals that they were similar in many respects, and the Assembly House no doubt fit the pattern. The 1766 assembly room in Salem, of the "plainest and most utilitarian character," contained

an elegant room 40 feet long, 30 feet wide and 18 feet high, with two handsome drawing-rooms adjoining and chambers over them, and a neat musick-gallery on the west side.<sup>11</sup>

The assembly house in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, built in 1750 by Michael Whidden, had a similar floor plan, with the exception that

9. EC Deeds, Book 156, leaf 244. At this time Mackey was apparently "living on income derived from the mortgaging or sale of his real estate." He had mortgaged the Assembly House land "excepting the buildings standing thereon" to William Wetmore of Boston on 1 June 1791 (EC Deeds, Book 153, leaf 73). The proprietors paid off the mortgage to Wetmore (EC Deeds, Book 155, leaf 184, discharged Book 156, leaf 82) and purchased the land. See Mrs. Emerson, "A Footnote . . .," p. 2.

10. EC Deeds, Book 158, leaf 171. The land was sold to John Warden, housewright, for £45.

11. The reference to the plainness of the 1766 assembly room is in Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 6, and the longer quotation is from the *Essex Gazette*, 28 November 1769, cited in Rantoul, "Washington in Essex County," p. 7. This first assembly room was destroyed by 1805.

the main ballroom was on the second floor, and was only one floor in height.<sup>12</sup> The Reverend William Bentley visited Portsmouth on 4 June 1787 and entered the following comparative notes in his famous diary:

In Vaughan Street is their assembly, which is much larger than that at Salem, but its paintings are not so elegant. The Hall is up a flight of stairs and of a single story. The fireplaces are as at Salem, on each side of the entrance, but the Music gallery has the appearance rather of a childish imitation, from the size of its balustrate, and must have an ill effect when the gallery is fitted. The benches are upon the floor, and not raised as at Salem.<sup>13</sup>

George Washington, who had just visited the Salem Assembly House, stopped in Portsmouth on 3 November 1789 and declared their assembly room to be "one of the best I have seen anywhere in the United States."<sup>14</sup> He had no comment on the Salem building.

Washington was also a visitor to the assembly room in the City Tavern, Alexandria, Virginia, built in 1793 and now installed in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This "large and lofty" room of about two stories in height contains two fireplaces, some elaborate woodwork, and an overhanging musician's gallery.<sup>15</sup> Henry Wansey, an English clothier, visited another assembly room in Oeller's Hotel in Philadelphia in 1794 and declared it to be

a most elegant room, sixty feet square, with a handsome music gallery at one end. It was papered after the French taste, with the Pantheon figures in compartments, imitating festoons, pillars,

12. The Portsmouth assembly house was divided into two parts by 1834, and was down by 1926. Short descriptions of it can be found in Helen Pearson, *Vignettes of Portsmouth* (Portsmouth: Helen Pearson and Harold Hotchkiss Bennet, 1913), p. 45; Charles W. Brewster, *Rambles about Portsmouth*, First Series (Portsmouth: Lewis Brewster, 1873), pp. 176-77, and Ralph May, *Early Portsmouth History* (Boston: C. E. Goodspeed and Co., 1926), p. 229.

13. *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D., Pastor of the East Church, Salem, Massachusetts* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1905-1914), 1:63 (hereafter referred to as Bentley).

14. Pearson, *Vignettes of Portsmouth*, p. 45.

15. R. T. H. Halsey and Charles O. Cornelius, *A Handbook of the American Wing* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1938), pp. 171-78, illustrated in Figure 85.

and groups of antique drawings, in the same style as lately introduced in London.<sup>16</sup>

Of a much simpler nature is the rural Frary Tavern in Deerfield, Massachusetts, which contains a second-story ballroom that was built in the 1760's. This room has a high vaulted ceiling, benches along the side, and a musician's gallery or balcony at one end, facing a fireplace at the other.<sup>17</sup> Both Washington Hall (1792) and Hamilton Hall (1804) in Salem contained the usual drawing-rooms, fireplaces, and musician's gallery.<sup>18</sup>

In the Salem Assembly House the proprietors apparently most closely followed the floor plan of the 1766 Salem assembly room. The ballroom must have run across the entire width of the back of the house, and been two stories, or about twenty feet in height. The front half of the house contained drawing rooms on either side of the front door on the first floor, and chambers above them. The entry hall and staircase divided the front half of the house. The staircase led first to a small musician's gallery, reached through a door on the landing, and then reversed direction and continued to rise to the second floor front rooms.<sup>19</sup>

In general, the building both inside and out was probably very plain and functional. Pynchon "could say little in favour of the drawing-

16. Quoted in Halsey and Cornelius, *Handbook*, p. 175.

17. Discussed and illustrated in Samuel Chamberlain and Henry N. Flynt, *Historic Deerfield: Houses and Interiors* (New York: Hastings House, 1972), pp. 133-34.

18. These are both illustrated in Kimball, *McIntire*, Figures 75-78 (Stearns block containing Washington Hall) and 267-70 (Hamilton Hall).

19. Such a description is offered (with a great deal more certainty) by Rantoul, "Washington in Essex County," p. 10, and by Margaret Ryan, "The Assembly House at Salem, Built in 1782 and Now Restored to Its Former Glory," *House Beautiful* 50 (August 1921):89-92. Ryan's article contains several errors—she attributes the front portico to McIntire and also states that the Assembly House was moved to its present location from Carpenter Street.

The possibility that the Assembly House ballroom was on the second floor, reached through the doorway on the staircase landing, cannot be entirely scouted. Certainly other ballrooms (for example, those at Portsmouth, Deerfield, and Hamilton Hall) were on the second floor. But given the size of the Assembly House, a one-floor or even a one-and-a-half-floor ballroom would have seemed small and cramped. There is no mention in Bentley or elsewhere of the location of the ballroom, although Bentley's description could be interpreted to infer that the Portsmouth room differed from the Assembly House in that its ballroom was on the second floor. The theory of a first-floor ballroom with a high ceiling must carry the most weight at the present time.

rooms, save that they serve as foils to the great room,"<sup>20</sup> and Washington was seemingly not impressed with any aspect of the building. The ballroom, while no doubt lavishly arranged for special occasions such as the visits of Lafayette and Washington, was usually somewhat bare and austere. Rows of benches lined the walls, and Pynchon tells us that a glass chandelier from Boston hung in the center of the room.<sup>21</sup> Bentley mentions the fireplaces, which were symmetrically placed and may have had attractively carved mantels and chimneybreasts. Bentley also mentions "elegant" paintings, which may be a reference to overmantels, fireboards, stenciled walls, or even murals. The walls might also have been paneled, at least to the chair rail height, and the cornice probably received a decorative treatment. There was probably little else in the way of furnishings, as Pynchon routinely records crowds of over one hundred people, and once some two hundred and twenty were in attendance.<sup>22</sup> Gaming tables could be found in the drawing-rooms,<sup>23</sup> as well as chairs, sofas, and so on. The large and well-finished basement leads one to believe that it was used regularly for the preparation of refreshments.

The Assembly House opened on the night of 1 January 1783, followed by a week of continuous evening entertainment. It was apparently a success, and various sorts of events were offered throughout the year, except during the warmest summer months. Pynchon was in frequent attendance at many of these programs during the early years of operation and his diary entries give us a very good picture of one aspect of Salem social life in the 1780s.

Pynchon was present at the opening concert on 1 January, and was back the next night for

Musick at the Assembly Room: 2 fiddles, F. horn, and drum. These and the assembly engross the conversation and attention of the young and gay; the elders shake their heads with, what are we coming to?<sup>24</sup>

On 5 January, Pynchon was otherwise occupied, but Mrs. Mary (Vial) Holyoke, along with three female companions, "went to the Hall to

20. Pynchon, p. 139.

21. Pynchon, p. 141.

22. Pynchon, pp. 142, 143-44, 141.

23. Pynchon, p. 141.

24. Pynchon, p. 140.

See the Ballance Master," who was, as George Francis Dow tells us, an Irish rope dancer.<sup>25</sup>

The Assembly House gatherings were both novel and popular, for on 15 January, Pynchon reiterates that "Music and dancing engross the whole conversation of the town," and the next night there were "about 90 persons at the assembly; 41 ladies and 28 gentlemen draw for dancing; the rest repair to [the] gaming-table."<sup>26</sup> The crowd the next night was even larger—two hundred and twenty tickets were sold, and "Overtures, symphonies, harmony, and Military Musick" were provided by the Massachusetts Band of Music between 6 and 9:30 p.m.<sup>27</sup>

Thus business was brisk, even though some New Englanders tended to regard such frivolousness with skepticism at that time. Neil Harris has stated that

The organization in 1785 of a Boston Tea Assembly which allowed card-playing and dancing raised a storm of protests and involved in its wake Sam Adams, James Bowdoin, Rufus King, and Elbridge Gerry. Some calm heads were around, but other Bostonians thought that "We are prostituting all our glory as a people for new modes of pleasure" and that Bostonians were "the most luxurious people in the history of the world."<sup>28</sup>

The Salem Assembly was accepted with much less furor in comparison, although, as Pynchon indicates, some of the older people had their reservations.

Occasionally events were held as charitable benefits, as the concerts of 24 and 25 January 1783, when "tickets were purchased at 6/9, chiefly for the benefit of the poor."<sup>29</sup> All was not necessarily going smoothly at the Assembly House, however, for Pynchon reports that there were

25. *The Holyoke Diaries 1709–1856*, ed. George Francis Dow (Salem: Essex Institute, 1911), p. 119.

26. Pynchon, p. 141.

27. Pynchon, p. 141. The evening's program of music, as advertised in *The Salem Gazette*, 16 January 1783, has been reprinted in Milton G. Hehr, "Concert Life in Salem," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 100(April 1964):100.

28. Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society. The Formative Years, 1790–1860* (New York: George Braziller, 1966), p. 32.

29. Pynchon, p. 142.

Jealousies, slanders, envying, among several of the assembly folk. Parties are forming, and a little more tattling and impudence throw the whole into confusion.<sup>30</sup>

These social discomforts did not dampen anyone's enthusiasm, as Pynchon records large crowds in attendance to hear a Major Swasey and D. Spofford sing, and to watch Mr. Greenwood and Mrs. White dance after the concert, during January and February.<sup>31</sup> Some feelings may have been bruised on 12 February when "Several offences were given by the young misses to the elderly gentlemen."<sup>32</sup> Pynchon felt that "common sense and decency might prevent all the jealousies and disorders," and that dignified people (such as himself) "could distinguish an assembly from a frolick," but the presence of "Otis, Amory, Pickman, and other collegians," no doubt from Harvard, merely made things worse.<sup>33</sup>

In April of 1783 "Mr. Bartlett's scholars" presented a play, which was attended by a "great audience" and was surely more edifying if not as entertaining as the program for 7 November 1783 when "the musick at Assembly was Prince, a drunken Irishman, and Duane, from the lower parish!"<sup>34</sup>

The progress of Assembly House events was likely eased by ample quantities of food and liquid libations, and a notice in *The Salem Gazette* of 15 November 1791 indicates that the proprietors chose "Managers and Stewarts" to handle the refreshments and other details on a day-to-day basis. William Stearns, himself a proprietor, provided the food, drink, and supplies for an event in March 1784. His bill to the other proprietors lists over £20 worth of wine, 5<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> gallons of West India rum, sugar, raisins, nutmegs, almonds, and biscuits. He also provided twenty-four wine glasses, two tables, two pitchers, two corkscrews, two bottles, candles, corks, and three loads of wood. His total bill was over £118.<sup>35</sup>

Such preparations were modest in comparison to the table set when Lafayette visited the house later in 1784. Lafayette was touring the

30. Pynchon, p. 142.

31. Pynchon, pp. 142, 143-44.

32. Pynchon, pp. 143-44.

33. Pynchon, p. 146.

34. Pynchon, pp. 151, 166.

35. William Stearns Manuscripts, volume dated 1744-1839, leaf 68, Essex Institute.

United States, and on 27 October, the word came that he would visit Salem.<sup>36</sup> On 29 October, as Pynchon's running account tells us, he was greeted in Salem with the same kind of adulation that he received elsewhere:

The Marquis La Fayette comes to town attended by . . . coaches [and] other carriages, [and] young gentlemen on horseback; they alight at Mr. Goodale's and take some refreshment, and chat awhile; then the company, clergymen, including the modest Dr. W., and merchants and mechanics, walk through the streets, the rabble giving them three cheers at each corner; the co[mpany] all having their hats on except the Marquis; the co[mpany] dine at the Assembly Room, [and] Judge John Pickering reads off a speech to the Marquis; he returns it *memoriter*, the music was . . . ; they drank tea at S. Page's, and had a ball at the A. Room [in the] evening.<sup>37</sup>

At the ball the "Marquis hath a stiff knee and danceth none" but "the French Chevalier walks a minuet with Miss Williams."<sup>38</sup> The party broke up at 12:30 in the morning, and the Marquis left at 5 a.m. for Portsmouth. As we might expect, the next day

the employment of each circle, club, and tea-table in Salem is in finding and proving and disputing as to neglects and affronts respecting the entertainments and ball for the Marquis.<sup>39</sup>

An interesting sidelight to Lafayette's visit is provided by a bill preserved at the Peabody Museum of Salem. Francis Cabot, one of the proprietors, paid Samuel McIntire for "fixing the temporary Tables in Concert Hall the 28 Oct," thus marking McIntire's first connection with the Assembly House.<sup>40</sup>

After this momentous occasion, events during the next few years

36. Pynchon, p. 198.

37. Pynchon, p. 198. *The Salem Gazette*, 2 November 1782, also has an account of Lafayette's visit.

38. Pynchon, p. 198.

39. Pynchon, p. 199.

40. This bill has been reprinted in Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 92. Kimball expressed some uncertainty as to whether this bill actually refers to the Assembly House. Given its date, and given the fact that Concert Hall was not built until 1793, it seems clear that this bill does refer to Lafayette's visit to the Assembly House.

must have seemed rather routine, although they continued at their regular pace. On 28 February 1786 "numbers of young people come from Boston and other towns to the Assembly, and at evening make a brilliant appearance," and about a month later, "the old folk are invited by tickets to the assembly."<sup>41</sup> On 9 November 1786 "at night a ball was made . . . for the Courts; the Chief Justice danced 2 country dances."<sup>42</sup> Enthusiasm had certainly not flagged on 19 December 1788 when a "very numerous Company" attended the ball, and "the aged Tarry till 12 or 1, the younger till 3 and 4."<sup>43</sup>

The second great event in the history of the Assembly House occurred on 29 October 1789 when President George Washington visited Salem on his tour of the eastern United States. Preparations were even more resplendent than for Lafayette's visit five years earlier. After receiving the compliments of the townspeople during the day, Washington attended the Assembly for about two hours in the evening. During the ball, according to local tradition, the

Hall was brilliantly lighted, and much decorated with leaves and flowers, and had, on either side, three rows of benches raised one above another . . . at the head of the hall was an arm-chair, offered by Elias Hasket Derby. . . .<sup>44</sup>

Bentley tells us that "the Ladies were numerous and brilliant"<sup>45</sup> on this occasion, and Washington confirms this in his own laconic diary entry concerning the day's events:

Rec'd the Compliments of many differt. classes of People, and in the evening, between 7 and 8 o'clock, went to an Assembly, where there was at least an hundred handsome and well dressed Ladies. Abt. nine I returned to my Lodgings.<sup>46</sup>

41. Pynchon, pp. 233, 235.

42. Pynchon, p. 255.

43. Pynchon, p. 325.

44. Rantoul, "Washington in Essex County," p. 8. This article contains a description of Washington's visit, and the story has been repeatedly told in Salem newspapers through the years (see the *Salem Mercury*, 3 November 1789, *Essex Register*, 8 July 1817, and *Salem Evening News*, 8 January 1932). Bentley also left us a good description (1: 130-31).

45. Bentley, 1:131.

46. *The Diary of George Washington From 1789 to 1791 . . .*, ed. Benson J. Lossing (New York: Charles B. Richardson, 1860), p. 39.

For years a tradition, now lost, existed in Salem which held that "a plank in the kitchen floor is . . . the one on which Gen. Washington danced."<sup>47</sup>

Washington paid another visit (of sorts) to the Assembly House in 1791, when a Mr. Bowen displayed a wax effigy of him as part of Bowen's traveling waxworks exhibition. Bowen's advertisement in *The Salem Gazette* of 18 October 1791 modestly describes and recommends his exhibition, which would open the next night:

It would be unnecessary to give a particular description of all the Figures in this large Exhibition; but among the most admired, we may enumerate, an excellent likeness of the PRESIDENT of the United States and his amiable Lady, with a representation of the President supporting the Union of Liberty, Justice, Peace, and Plenty. His Excellency Gov. HANCOCK, who was one of the first of the patriotic members that signed the Declaration of American Independence—a sincere Friend to his Country. The celebrated *Hamilton*, Secretary of the Treasury of the United States. Three beautiful female Figures, representing a *Boston*, *Rhodeisland*, and *Philadelphia* Beauty. The unfortunate *Baron TRENCK* in real chains. Doctor FRANKLIN, dressed in a suit of his own clothes, with about *Twenty* other Figures in full stature.

This remarkable exhibition was open eleven hours a day, except Saturday evenings and Sundays, and cost one shilling and sixpence for adults and ninepence for children. Bowen was careful to state that "*No reduction in the price will take place.*"

The last event for which we have a record as being held in the Assembly House was a concert given on Tuesday, 9 September 1794, and advertised, as usual, in *The Salem Gazette*. The program included music for violin, flute, clarinet, and voice, and tickets were priced at fifty cents each.<sup>48</sup>

47. This tradition (which lends a small amount of credence to the theory that the ballroom was on the first floor) is in a manuscript prepared by L. Adele Decker, dated 7 December 1905, at the Essex Institute.

48. This advertisement has been reprinted in Hehr, "Concert Life," pp. 122-23. Very possibly this event was held in Concert Hall, which had been built the year before.



The Assembly House,  
138 Federal Street, Salem,  
front and south-side per-  
spective elevation. *Photographs  
of interiors and exteriors by  
Richard Merrill, 1972.*



Original doorway with later  
mid-nineteenth-century  
addition of front portico



Front elevation for the house by Samuel McIntire. Essex Institute Archives.



Sketch, front elevation, by Daniel Bancroft, chief builder for Samuel McIntire. Essex Institute Archives.



East parlor, furnished with Chinese furniture and China trade objects



Dining room showing the fireplace wall and the twentieth-century Chinese-style wallpaper



West chamber, second floor, furnished with a profusely carved rococo revival parlor set of the mid-nineteenth century



East chamber, second floor, showing bed-hangings of yellow and red moreen, portrait of Captain John Bertram, and bureau by William Hook

Two of the Assembly House proprietors, William Stearns (1754–1819) and Jonathan Waldo (1754–1815), had joined with Benjamin Pickman to build what was known as the Stearns block on the corner of Essex and Washington Streets in Salem. This brick building, “the first pretentious commercial building in Salem and one of the earliest unified business blocks in the country,” was designed by Samuel McIntire in 1792. Inside was Washington Hall, “a fine assembly-hall . . . with a strong Doric cornice, coved ceiling, and balustrated musician’s gallery.” This block stood until 1902, and the balcony and some of the woodwork from the assembly room have been preserved by the Essex Institute.<sup>49</sup>

With the completion of the Stearns block, Stearns, a Harvard graduate (class of 1766) who operated an apothecary and grocery store at what is now 244 Essex Street, and Waldo, also an apothecary, began a concerted effort to shift the center of festivities in Salem from the Assembly House to Washington Hall. Beginning with the purchase of Stephen Cleaveland’s share on 8 November 1793 by Stearns, and ending with Waldo’s purchase of four shares from John Norris on 13 March 1797, they systematically purchased control of the Assembly House stock. Some twenty-nine deeds were required for Waldo to gain complete control of the house and land. The language of these deeds is consistent. The grantor grants to either Waldo or Stearns a certain number of “rights or shares in the assembly house with . . . all the furniture chandeliers and other articles belonging thereto.” In many instances, the “said William Stearns” or the “said Jonathan Waldo” is noted in the deed as “being now in the actual and peaceable possession of the premises.” Stearns and Waldo purchased shares individually at first, and after Stearns had accumulated a number of shares, he sold them along with his own interest to Waldo. In this manner, Waldo gained possession of the property by 1797.<sup>50</sup>

From these deeds we obtain our first full look at the Assembly

49. The Stearns block is discussed and illustrated in Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 68 and Figures 75–78. The quotations are from p. 10.

50. A complete list of these deeds is on file at the Essex Institute. For examples, see Stephen Cleaveland to Stearns (EC Deeds, Book 157, leaf 221), Nathan Goodale to Stearns (EC Deeds, Book 158, leaf 164), Benjamin Goodhue to Waldo (EC Deeds, Book 161, leaf 164), and Norris to Waldo (EC Deeds, Book 161, leaf 166).

House proprietors.<sup>51</sup> They are listed below in alphabetical order, with their involvement in Assembly House stock listed in parentheses.

1. Jacob Ashton ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  shares).
2. Samuel Blanchard (2 shares).
3. Samuel Blyth (5 shares).
4. Francis Cabot (either 4 or 5 shares).
5. Stephen Cleaveland (1 share).
6. Elias Hasket Derby (either  $2\frac{1}{2}$  or  $4\frac{1}{2}$  shares).
7. John Fisk (4 shares).
8. Jonathan Gardner (2 shares).
9. Nathan Goodale (2 shares).
10. Benjamin Goodhue (2 shares).
11. Joseph and Joshua Grafton (2 shares jointly).
12. William Gray, Jr. ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  shares).
13. Jonathan Haraden ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  shares).
14. Edward Augustus Holyoke (1 share).
15. Peter Lander (2 shares).
16. John Norris (4 shares).
17. Josiah Orne ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  shares).
18. William Orne (1 share).
19. Isaac Osgood (2 shares).
20. John Page (2 shares).
21. Benjamin Pickman, Jr. (5 shares).
22. William Pickman (1 share).
23. Edward Pulling (1 share).
24. Archaelaus Putnam (1 share).
25. Bartholemew Putnam ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  shares).
26. Thomas Saunders (1 share).
27. William Stearns.
28. Jonathan Waldo.
29. Joshua Ward ( $2\frac{1}{2}$  shares).
30. Benjamin West (1 share).

<sup>51</sup>. Fiske Kimball apparently overlooked those proprietors who sold their shares to Stearns, relying on only those deeds which listed Waldo as the grantee. Thus the list which is in *McIntire*, p. 93, contains only twenty names, one of which (William Prescott) I have been unable to confirm as a proprietor.

Much has been written in other contexts concerning most of these proprietors as individuals, and the Essex Institute possesses manuscript collections pertaining to nearly every one of them.

Stearns bought up nineteen shares, according to an agreement preserved at the Essex Institute, and adding his own share, sold twenty shares to Waldo on 19 June 1796.<sup>52</sup> With one exception,<sup>53</sup> Waldo then purchased the remainder of the shares. Prices for shares varied considerably, but the average seems to have been about \$20 to \$25, and Waldo's total purchase price was \$1,579.49, as nearly as can be determined.<sup>54</sup>

Of this group of proprietors, at least ten were merchants, including William Orne (1752–1815), the Grafton brothers, and of course Elias Hasket Derby (1739–1799). Benjamin Goodhue (1748–1814), Samuel Blyth (1744–1795), and Edward Holyoke (1728–1829) are well-known figures in Salem history. Most of the proprietors were from Salem, the exceptions being Nathan Goodale from Boston, Archaelaus Putnam from Danvers, and Samuel Blanchard from Wenham. By the time he sold his shares, Francis Cabot had left Salem for Philadelphia.

Waldo, after holding the house for only a short time, sold what was called his “Mansion House and Land in Federal Street . . . with all the Buildings thereon standing” to Samuel Putnam on 24 July 1798 for \$2,656. And, at about this time, Samuel McIntire was engaged to remodel the Assembly House, turning it from a plain public meeting hall into an elaborate and fashionable dwelling. Whether this was done for Waldo (as traditionally assumed, but which seems rather unlikely given his short tenancy, unless he had it improved to increase its resale value) or for Putnam remains unclear. McIntire had performed work for Waldo and several of the other proprietors, and he was a logical choice for the job.

McIntire’s work on the house is documented by a front elevation preserved among his papers at the Essex Institute. This elevation, though unsigned and undated, is in McIntire’s handwriting and according to

52. This document, dated 18 June 1796, is entitled “Estimate of Money to be paid Doctr. Stearns for his Part Assembly House & Land As by Agreement made with Him.” Its precise meaning is unclear—it consists mostly of figures, which appear to be valuations of the shares owned by about fifteen proprietors. It is in the Stearns and Sprague Family Manuscripts, Essex Institute.

53. Derby’s sale to Stearns (EC Deeds, Book 161, leaf 164) was apparently never transferred to Waldo. This deed mentions Derby’s shares as amounting to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  shares in one instance, but  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in another.

54. EC Deeds, Book 164, leaf 111.

Fiske Kimball was "undoubtedly drawn" by him.<sup>55</sup> The elevation is also drawn on paper which Kimball states McIntire used between 1795 and 1804,<sup>56</sup> and it clearly establishes McIntire as the architect in charge of the remodeling.

Also preserved in the library of the Essex Institute is another sketch of the front of the Assembly House, apparently copied from the McIntire elevation. This too is unsigned, but may with safety be attributed to Daniel Bancroft, McIntire's chief builder. According to Bentley, Bancroft did the "best work in Salem" of any "practical man in every part of Carpentry in house building."<sup>57</sup> He was not skilled at drawing, however, and his elevation lacks good proportion and is in many ways carelessly done. It was probably a working plan, and while much of the carving was left to McIntire, the basic carpentry work done on the Assembly House must be attributed to the skilled artisan hands and judgment of Bancroft.

McIntire's drawing enriched the front of the Assembly House by adding four pairs of Ionic pilasters to the second story of a flat-boarded facade. The hip roof was given a broad pediment across the front, which enclosed a semicircular fanlight. The front doorway was elaborated with rosettes and bellflowers, and a balustrade was added to the roof. The windows were symmetrically placed, and were to contain six-over-six panes of 14-by-10-inch glass. The entire design, measured and elegant, is in keeping with McIntire's adoption of the Adamesque style, which Kimball dates as beginning with the design of the Nathan Read house in 1793.<sup>58</sup>

The elevation of the Joseph Coolidge, Sr., house in Boston done by Charles Bulfinch in 1791-92 bears a strong resemblance to McIntire's Assembly House drawing, one major difference being that Bulfinch includes a Palladian window.<sup>59</sup> The Coolidge house was based on the

55. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 12.

56. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 93.

57. Bentley, 4:525.

58. Kimball, *McIntire*, illustrates the Assembly House elevation in Figure 158, and discusses McIntire's adoption of the Adamesque style on page 45 and elsewhere. The facade of the Assembly House is discussed by Frank Cousins and Phil M. Riley in their early study of *The Colonial Architecture of Salem* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1919), pp. 218-19. They, however, attribute the original 1782 structure to McIntire, an attribution for which there is no evidence.

59. Bulfinch's elevation of the Coolidge, Sr., house is reproduced in Harold Kirker, *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), Figure 14.

Royal Society of Arts building in London, designed by Robert Adam in 1772–74, and it gave Boston what has been described as its “first taste of Neoclassical architecture.”<sup>60</sup> While no document exists to prove that McIntire ever saw the Coolidge house, we do know that he made sketches of Bulfinch’s Barrell house (1792–93) in Somerville and Thomas Russell house (1793–96) in Charlestown.<sup>61</sup> The Lyman house, designed by McIntire in 1793–98, was inspired by the Barrell house,<sup>62</sup> and McIntire may well have drawn on the Coolidge house in preparing his Assembly House elevation. McIntire’s drawing also bears a resemblance to Bulfinch’s John Joy house (Boston, 1791) and many of its elements can be found in the small collection of English prints, such as “Ironmongers Hall in Fenchurch Street, London,” owned by McIntire.<sup>63</sup> In all respects the Assembly House elevation is derived from the Adamesque as interpreted by Bulfinch, and a comparison of the elevations by Adam, Bulfinch, and McIntire provides an interesting example of the transfer and successive provincialization of design, from London, to Boston, and eventually to Salem. The Americans, McIntire even more so than Bulfinch, take Adam’s design and reduce it to an abstraction. In McIntire’s hands, the facade becomes more attenuated, more planar, ultimately more two-dimensional. Further, this relationship between Adam, Bulfinch, and McIntire is an example of our continued artistic dependence on English models after our political independence had been secured in the Revolution.

The major structural change which must have taken place in the interior of the Assembly House was the division of the grand ballroom in half by the creation of a second-story floor, reached through the door on the landing of the staircase. McIntire’s elevation indicates that the house was to have two floors, each 10 feet 3 inches in height. Much of the woodwork must have been reworked or added by McIntire and

60. Kirker, *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*, p. 41. The Adam design is illustrated in Figure 15.

61. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 10. The Barrell house (Figures 16–18, 20–21) and the Russell house (Figure 37) are illustrated in Kirker, *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*.

62. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 11. See also Helen Hall, “Samuel McIntire’s Elegant Town Houses” *Country Life*, 7 September 1972, pp. 559–60.

63. The Joy house is illustrated in Kirker, *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*, Figure 13. The relationship between Bulfinch and McIntire is perceptively discussed by Abbott Lowell Cummings in “Samuel McIntire and His Sources,” *Samuel McIntire, A Bicentennial Symposium, 1757–1957* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1957), pp. 52–53. This excellent essay also reproduces McIntire’s copy of the Ironmonger’s Hall print (Figure 25).

Bancroft, but all that survives is in the front east parlor, the central hallway, and on the landing of the staircase. The mantel in the parlor is carved with a row of dentils and has composition ornaments which are probably derived from the works of William Pain and are quite typical of McIntire's work. The recesses on either side of the chimney are framed with fluted pilasters having Ionic entablatures, harmonizing with the design on the exterior. The fluted pilasters and the capitals with cherub heads in the hallway also appear to be the work of McIntire. Kimball has attributed the stairway to McIntire, terming it the "earliest of the surviving examples" in McIntire's Adamesque style. The balusters have a rather plain profile, and the ends of the steps have solid brackets which alternate with groups of flutings, and the possibility exists that this simple stairway dates to the beginning of the house in 1782. These stairs lead first to a landing, where a grandiose pedimented doorway flanked by pilasters leads somewhat incongruously to the rear half of the house. In the center of the broken pediment of this doorway rests a classical revival woman's bust, attributed on stylistic grounds to the Skillin family of Boston.<sup>64</sup>

Other alterations, including the prominent front porch, were made by later occupants and will be discussed in conjunction with the periods of their ownership.

Thus the Assembly House has great importance in any assessment of McIntire's career. Through his elevation, the house stands as a documented example of his work in his early Adamesque style. The Essex Institute, also the owner of the late Georgian Peirce-Nichols House (1782) and the more refined and neoclassical Gardner-Pingree House (1804), benefits by maintaining houses which illustrate each phase of McIntire's stylistic development.

## II

With Waldo's sale of the house in 1798, the Assembly House entered a period of one hundred and sixty-seven years in which it served as a private dwelling. Its first occupant, other than Waldo, was Samuel Putnam, born in Danvers on 13 May 1768, the son of Deacon Gideon Putnam, and the only one of the deacon's ten children to survive until

64. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 19, and Essex Institute museum files accession number 131, 344. A similar but less elaborate doorway existed in McIntire's Joshua Ward house (1784-87), and is illustrated in Kimball, *McIntire*, Figure 4.

maturity.<sup>65</sup> He was educated in Beverly, at the Andover Academy, and at Harvard College, where he was a member of the class of 1787. After graduation Putnam studied law briefly in Newburyport, where he developed a friendship with his fellow law student John Quincy Adams. Putnam opened his own law office in Salem in 1790, quickly gaining a reputation as a competent, if not dynamic, lawyer specializing in commercial law.

Putnam married Sarah Gooll, a niece of Timothy Pickering, in 1795. Putnam and his wife were to live in the Assembly House until their removal to Boston in 1833, raising eight children during those years. They maintained a summer home on Holten Street in Danvers, spending only the winter months in Salem.

Aside from the alterations made by McIntire and previously discussed (for which the Putnams may or may not have been responsible), Samuel and Sarah made at least two other minor changes to the house. John Dodge, a Salem handyman, billed Putnam on 30 March 1803 for his labor in "Altring fier Place," and for his supplies of "to [two] Hundred of Bricks."<sup>66</sup> Another improvement occurred several years later for as Kimball has pointed out, "the character of the cornice in the southeast room of the second floor points to a date about 1810."<sup>67</sup> This simple carved wooden cornice alternates medallions with groups of flutings. No doubt the Putnams made other small changes over the course of thirty-five years, but none that can be determined with any degree of surety at this date.

Putnam's success as a lawyer enabled him to be elected to the state

65. Sources drawn on for material concerning Samuel Putnam and his family, unless otherwise cited, include Elizabeth Cabot Putnam and Harriet Sylvester Tapley, *The Hon. Samuel Putnam and Sarah (Gooll) Putnam with a Genealogical Record of their Descendents* (Danvers, 1922); Lyrus Augustus Bartol, *A Discourse on the Life and Character of Samuel Putnam, L.L.D., A.A.S. . . .* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, and Co., 1853); and Frank W. Grinnell, "A Glimpse of the Life of an Essex County Judge," *Massachusetts Law Quarterly* 8(November 1922).

A memoir of Mrs. Putnam is contained in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 23 November 1864.

Manuscript collections include "Putnam Family, genealogical, marine papers, etc., 1681-1863" and "Samuel Putnam Correspondence," both at the Essex Institute, and "Samuel Putnam Papers" at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

66. John Dodge Account Book, Essex Institute.

67. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 93. Such a cornice could have been added at nearly any time over a thirty-year span and may have been installed when Dodge was working on the fireplaces in 1803.

legislature from 1808 to 1814, and in the latter year he was appointed Judge of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, a position he held for the next twenty-eight years. Putnam's rise in the legal world was not always regarded favorably, and he had at least one enemy in the form of William Bentley. Putnam served as the prosecuting attorney for Timothy Pickering in the libel case brought against William Carlton, publisher of the Salem *Register*, in 1803.<sup>68</sup> The trial was largely a political one, sides were sharply drawn, and the battle was a bitter one. Bentley, as a Republican and frequent contributor to the *Register* (it was suggested more than once that he was the actual author of the libelous pieces), and as a close personal friend of Carlton (they both rented rooms in what is now the Crowninshield-Bentley House, also owned by the Essex Institute), could see little to admire in either the appearance or abilities of Putnam. "Little Putnam," as Bentley referred to the lawyer, was "small in person, pert in manners," and during the Carlton trial was

very busy, talking everywhere, & a might[y] blusterer. In his pleading at court, he has been ordered to sit down, it should have been added as often as is to naughty boys & sit still.<sup>69</sup>

Despite (or because of) his blustering, and for larger political reasons, Putnam won his case against Carlton. The trial was a tremendous ordeal for the printer. He became ill shortly after entering jail, and soon died, leaving behind his wife and children.

Putnam was also connected with another famous Salem trial, when he was the presiding judge at the celebrated White murder case of 1830. The elderly Joseph White, murdered brutally in his sleep, was the owner of the Gardner-Pingree House, involving Putnam with another house owned today by the Essex Institute.<sup>70</sup>

In 1833 Putnam sold the Assembly House to Benjamin Porter Chamberlain, and removed to Boston, where he spent the remainder of his days. He retired in 1842, died on 3 July 1853, and was buried in Danvers.

Chamberlain was a Boston merchant, with offices at Lewis Wharf, who apparently preferred to spend his evenings and leisure time in

68. The best account of this trial is in Harriet Silvester Tapley, *Salem Imprints, 1768-1825* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1927), pp. 112-28.

69. Bentley, 4:99; 3:352; 3:24.

70. The best recent account of this trial is in the *Boston Sunday Herald*, 9 April 1967.

Salem. The details of his life are largely unknown. He bought the “Dwelling house stable & all the buildings” on the Assembly House property on 20 June 1833, paying Putnam the sum of \$4,200.<sup>71</sup> His address is listed in the Salem directories as 62 Federal Street until 1855, when the street was extended on the eastern end. The address was then changed to 138 Federal Street, which it remains today. For stylistic reasons, the front portico on the Assembly House has long been attributed to the period of Chamberlain’s ownership, which extended to 1856.<sup>72</sup> This porch has a massive grapevine frieze, with large carved leaves and fruit, supported by Ionic columns carved to match the pilasters on the front of the house. The treatment is characteristic of the heavy hand of the mid-nineteenth century, and while this portico largely obscures the delicate McIntire door, it has become a traditional and accepted part of the house.

Chamberlain deeded the house to Anne A. Chase, the wife of Stephen A. Chase of Salem, on 1 August 1856, for \$9,500, over twice Chamberlain’s purchase price.<sup>73</sup> The Salem directories and other sources list no occupation for Stephen Abbott Chase, who was born on 22 August 1796, the son of Abijah and Mary (Abbott) Chase. He was the treasurer of the Friends Church in 1859, and died before 1878. His wife died on 24 August 1878, leaving all her estate to her brother Sylvester C. Robinson.<sup>74</sup>

The elderly Robinson resided in the Assembly House from 1878 until his death in 1883. In his will Robinson had authorized his brother Edward H. Robinson of Providence to “sell all the real estate I may leave as soon after my death as may be practicable at public auction or private sale as he may judge best.”<sup>75</sup> On 16 July 1883 Edward followed these instructions and sold the house and land to Mary A. Bertram, widow of the Salem merchant and philanthropist John Bertram (1796–1882), for \$7,000.<sup>76</sup>

John Bertram had been a very successful merchant in his early years,

71. EC Deeds, Book 271, leaf 18.

72. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 93, and Cousins and Riley, *The Colonial Architecture of Salem*, pp. 218–19.

73. EC Deeds, Book 536, leaf 162.

74. Essex County Probate Records, Volume 433, leaf 343.

75. Essex County Probate Records, Volume 438, leaf 354.

76. EC Deeds, Book 1111, leaf 299.

sending ships such as his 1,100-ton *John Bertram* to places as remote as St. Helena, Patagonia, Madagascar, and Zanzibar. In his later career he added to his wealth by building and managing railroads in the American west. One of Salem's two or three great benefactors, Bertram helped establish the Salem hospital and the Bertram Home for Aged Men. At his death he was universally admired in Salem.<sup>77</sup>

Mary Ann (Ropes) Bertram (1817–1909) was the third wife of John Bertram. They were married on 27 June 1848 and lived much of their life together in the brick mansion at 370 Essex Street built in 1855. After her husband's death, Mary Bertram felt the need for smaller quarters, and moved to the Assembly House, which stands only a few yards behind their Essex Street home. She generously donated their former home to the city of Salem for use as a public library, which, greatly altered, it remains to this day.

At about this time, Henry Kimball Oliver, a Federal Street neighbor, wrote with fondness of the Assembly House, which had entered and become a part of Salem's historical tradition. Oliver described its

handsome iron fence, with suitable gateways, [and] an ample opening with broad steps [which] leads to the front door, at which stands a wide porch, its roof supported by Ionic columns. The entrance to its side door is on the westerly side where is another wide porch supported by columns. Two Ionic pilasters are also in each side of this porch, on the body of the house. Between the house and the next house, west . . . is a very wide deep yard nearly square, of not less than half an acre with large well grown shade trees and back of this yard, northerly is a large barn. It is altogether a beautiful estate, and for a city, a rare one.<sup>78</sup>

He concluded that the Assembly House “is most dignified in its looks and none more beautiful can be found in Salem.”

77. John Bertram's career has been touched upon in numerous publications. Relied on most heavily here were the *Catalogue of Portraits in the Essex Institute, Salem, Massachusetts* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1936), pp. 11–12; Charles S. Osgood and H. M. Batchelder, *Historical Sketch of Salem* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1879), pp. 135–36; and Hamilton D. Hurd, *History of Essex County, Massachusetts* (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Co., 1888), 1:233–35.

78. Letter of Henry Kimball Oliver to Frances H. Lee, in “Henry K. Oliver's Reminiscences of Federal Street, written in 1885” *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 82 (April 1946):184.

In her will of 5 February 1903 Mary Bertram divided her considerable estate among her many relatives, and it was two years after her death before the deed was transferred to Jennie M. Emmerton (1837–1912) of Salem.<sup>79</sup> In a complicated transaction, Joseph A. Ropes, Alice Ropes, and Charlotte Ropes of Lincoln, Elizabeth Ropes of Brooklyn, New York, Horace Ropes of Albany, New York, Mary S. Humphrey of Englewood, New Jersey, Clara R. Prescott of Orange, New Jersey, Arthur D. Ropes of Quincy, Eleanor R. Frasier of Fruitvale, California, Gertrude Pottinger of Oakland, California, John Bertram Ropes and Gertrude Simpson, both of Salem, “being heirs-at-law of Mary A. Bertram, deceased,” sold the house on 18 October 1911 to Mrs. Emmerton for \$7,000.<sup>80</sup>

Mrs. Emmerton, the widow of George R. Emmerton, was no stranger to these grantors, for she was the daughter of John Bertram and his first wife, Mary C. Smith (1801–1837). Mrs. Emmerton was in possession of the house for less than a year, her death coming on 15 August 1912. She was survived by two daughters, Caroline O. Emmerton and Annie Bertram Shattuck, who equally divided her estate, Caroline receiving the Assembly House as part of her share.

Miss Caroline O. Emmerton, well known in Salem for her charitable and preservationist work (combined effectively in the House of the Seven Gables project), leased the house to George and Lorna Upton from 1912 to 1919.<sup>81</sup> George Upton had lived in Marblehead in 1906, and moved to 24 Chestnut Street in Salem in 1907. He was employed as the general manager of the American Glue Company in Peabody, and lived in the Assembly House until he moved to Boston in mid-1919.

Miss Emmerton sold the house to Joseph Newton Smith on 19 July 1919,<sup>82</sup> and the house was to remain in the Smith family until 1965. Smith, president of a manufacturing company in Cambridge, made some minor alterations to his new home in 1920, and the extent of these can be seen in the blueprints which he deposited at that time in the Essex Institute. The main changes involved the extension of the

79. For a discussion of her estate, see Essex County Probate Records, Volume 649, leaf 346, docket #106488.

80. EC Deeds, Book 2105, leaf 551.

81. EC Deeds, Book 2418, leaf 489, mentions this lease.

82. EC Deeds, Book 2418, leaf 489.

rear east room several feet to the east and the creation of a small addition to the northeast back of the house. Smith, like the Bertrams and the Emmertons, was a generous person who was also interested in history and preservation. He was active in the Essex Institute's restoration of the Peirce-Nichols House, and it is fitting that his home should now be preserved by the same institution.

The Assembly House passed to Lillie C. S. Smith, Joseph's wife, in 1952,<sup>83</sup> and after her death, to their daughter Mary Silver Smith.<sup>84</sup> Miss Smith, now a staff member at the Institute, generously gave the house to the Essex Institute in 1965,<sup>85</sup> and with her sister Sylvia (Mrs. Usher P. Coolidge) permitted many fine pieces of family furniture and furnishings to remain in the house.

### III

Preparations for opening the Assembly House to the public as the newest member of the Institute's family of houses took several years to complete. Finally, in 1972, the house was presented for exhibition, "furnished to represent the different generations of Salem families who lived here, from the late 18th through the 19th century," and freshly painted and papered.<sup>86</sup> The front rooms and chambers were furnished with striking pieces in highly individualistic styles, many of them products of Salem's nineteenth-century trade with the Far East. The east parlor, for example, contains many fine pieces of mid-nineteenth-century furniture from Zanzibar, India, and China—intricately and elaborately carved pieces which make a sharp contrast with the more austere McIntire woodwork. Although the dark foliate carving and the massive form of the furniture give it a certain uniformity of appearance, a closer examination reveals a variety of motifs and styles of carving. The sofa and small side chair by the fireplace are of Indian manufacture, perhaps from Bombay, about 1850–1860, and are carved in a densely interwoven composition of flowers, leaves, and vines. The legs are formed in heavy rococo curves, capped with heads of fantastic animals. Contrast these tightly carved pieces of furniture with the other sofa and

83. Essex County Probate Records, Volume 1197, leaf 362.

84. Essex County Probate Records, Volume 1319, leaf 5.

85. EC Deeds, Book 5299, leaf 128.

86. Unsigned manuscript entitled "Assembly House," dated 16 March 1972, Essex Institute museum files.

the armchair brought from Calcutta in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The later examples have a loosely woven, but nonetheless intricate, carved composition of grapes, vines, and leaves which match their generously open form.

Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, furniture was made in India for export to western centers of trade. Styles followed those popular in the West. The rococo revival of the mid-nineteenth century is evident in these rooms, for there were few furniture forms indigenous to India. Traditional Indian craftsmanship appears in the complete covering of the surface with carved ornament similar to that found on Indian architecture and religious woodwork, which varied according to region.<sup>87</sup>

The incorporation of western ornament, as well as form, became prevalent in late nineteenth-century Chinese furniture, as exemplified by the massive, marble-topped center table. The Chinese also had a strong tradition of furniture form and decoration which infiltrated western design from the seventeenth century onward. The tall back side chair, particularly oriental in design, was used in an American household in Hanchow, China. Daniel N. Spooner, its owner, an agent for Russell and Sturgis Company in China, brought this chair back with him when he returned to Salem in 1857.

Several smaller side chairs in lighter exotic woods, as well as a cabinet, come from Zanzibar in the Indian Ocean. The Greek anthemion motif was used with a bold, free manner, reflecting the exaggerated and sculptural form of the chairs. While entire parlor sets of oriental furniture were used in mid-nineteenth-century drawing rooms and parlors, usually only one or two examples were arranged among other furniture of European and American manufacture by the end of the century. Such oriental accents created an exotic and dramatic effect in late Victorian interior decor, as many photographs of interiors testify.

The western room on the first floor is furnished as a dining room and retains its Chinese reproduction wallpaper installed by the Smiths in the 1940s. The eight side chairs are fine examples of Salem-area craftsman-

87. Very little study has been made of export furniture, and lack of documentation on specific origins of individual pieces makes attribution to region or country difficult. The New England Historic Genealogical Society owns a thirteen-piece set of Bombay black-wood furniture, accompanied by its invoice of April 1855, made out to John Atkinson, a Bostonian. The set includes a piano for which the Chickering factory in Boston made the works in 1872. See Carl Crossman, *The China Trade* (Princeton: The Pyne Press, 1972).

ship in the Chippendale style, 1760–1785, while the serving table, in the neoclassical style, dates from 1790–1800. The grapevine-and-leaf carving and the star-punch background on the three-quarter-round corners are Salem motifs.<sup>88</sup>

Furniture in the second-floor hallway reflects an earlier era of Chinese furniture manufacture and export. Designs were adapted directly from western models and there was little evidence that a piece of furniture was Chinese, except for the use of exotic woods and an occasional misinterpretation of a western form or decorative motif. The caned settee in the Grecian style and the camphorwood campaign chest which opens into a desk are both decorated with a large carved shell.<sup>89</sup> The boldly styled Grecian, or Empire, side and armchair, reminiscent of Thomas Hope's published designs of 1807, were brought back from Antigua in the West Indies by Mrs. John Clarke Lee, who was born there in 1804; she subsequently lived at 14 Chestnut Street in Salem. The wood used appears to be American bird's-eye maple, which may have been exported to the West Indies. Two scenes of "The Smugglers" were painted in China and brought to this country in 1800 by Captain William Cleveland of Salem.

The east room on the second floor is arranged as a bedroom with a massive colonial revival bed dominating the room. The bed is dressed with yellow and red moreen hangings of about 1828.<sup>90</sup> With their use of contrasting maple and mahogany veneers, the late Sheraton dressing table and matching bureau, attributed to William Hook, are perhaps the most stylish pieces of Salem furniture in the house.<sup>91</sup>

Across the hall, the west chamber has been innovatively furnished as a Victorian parlor of the mid-nineteenth century, although the original Federal period color scheme of the walls and woodwork has been care-

88. Dean A. Fales, Jr., *Essex County Furniture* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1965), catalogue number 65. For a similar serving table, see Edwin Hipkiss, *M. and M. Karolik Collection of Eighteenth Century American Arts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), catalogue number 49.

89. This sofa was published in *The Magazine Antiques* 45 (January 1944):42; traditionally it is said to have been brought to America by Benjamin Joy, first Consul General to India. See Crossman, *The China Trade*, illustration 128, for a nearly identical sofa now in the Philadelphia Art Museum.

90. Abbott L. Cummings, *Bedhangings* (Boston: S.P.N.E.A., 1961), fig. 55.

91. Fales, *Essex County Furniture*, catalogue numbers 18 and 19.

fully restored.<sup>92</sup> An exceptionally well-carved eight-piece rococo revival parlor set (1855–1860) fills the room. The carved intricacies of this American-made furniture contribute to a modern understanding of the nineteenth-century person's love of oriental furniture such as that in the downstairs parlor. Rooms were decorated with statuary and bric-a-brac placed on every flat surface, including the many shelves of the étagère, or whatnot, whose mirrors reflect the shelves and their objects, doubling the cluttered effect. Nineteenth-century Americans had a penchant for collecting from their travels in all parts of the world: a statue of Mercury from Italy or France, European landscapes and copies of old masters, or a table of shells from the South Pacific added cultural sophistication to American interiors. A small melodeon made by William P. Hastings of Portland, Maine, about 1860, belonged to Mrs. John Bertram, a former resident in the Assembly House. Ingrain strip carpeting in bright colors and bold designs covered the floors of most rooms from about 1830 on, adding to the studied confusion of objects and patterns of the mid-nineteenth-century interior.

The Institute staff, under the guidance of Mr. David B. Little, director, and Mrs. Gilbert R. Payson, curator, made no determined attempt to "restore" the house to a particular date. Showing great sympathy for the individuality and gradual evolution of the house, they furnished it in such a way that the rich and varied history of the house could be fully preserved and, furthermore, interpreted. Some minor restoration work did take place in the hallway, when "in removing the old hall wallpaper, evidence of pediments formerly over the hall doorways was found."<sup>93</sup> Reproductions based on the outlines found on the plaster walls were made and installed in 1969–1970. Other changes which had occurred through the years, such as the Victorian front porch and oriel window on the west side, were left intact.

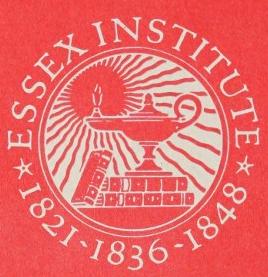
Thus outfitted, the Assembly House entered the third, and hopefully last, phase of its existence, preserved as a building that embodies much of Salem's social and architectural history.

92. "Assembly House," Essex Institute museum files. The furnishings are also discussed by Mrs. Payson in "Report of the Curator," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 108 (October 1972):344.

93. Mrs. Payson, "Report of the Curator," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 106 (October 1970):218.



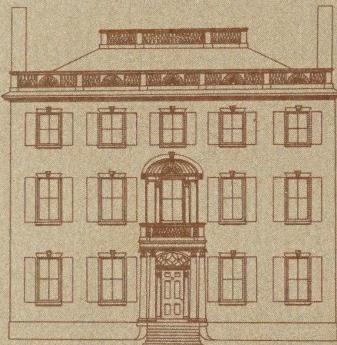




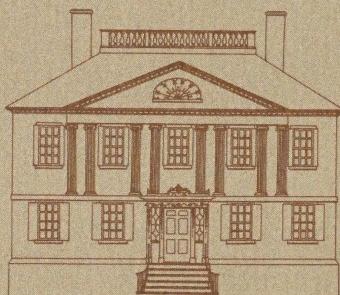


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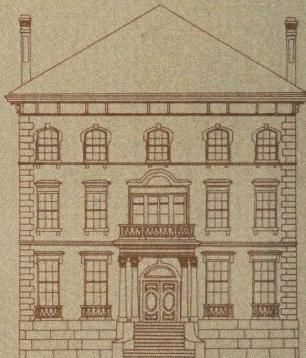
## Historic House Booklet Series



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